



NEWS RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE # 102809-193
DATE: October 28, 2009
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MISSION COMPLETE: 33RD INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM FINISHES YEARLONG MOBILIZATION

Nearly 3,000 Illinois National Guard Soldiers finish yearlong deployment from Afghanistan

By Mike Chrisman-Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD – Tears of sadness turned to tears of joy as thousands of Illinois families recently hugged their loved one for the first time since their Soldier was deployed into harm's way.

After more than a year away from their friends and family, the Soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) are home. The overseas deployment of nearly 3,000 Illinois National Guard Soldiers from 30 units across the state was the largest in state history since World War II.

The 33rd IBCT was mobilized during the summer 2008 as Task Force Phoenix VIII in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Their primary mission was to train and mentor Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police forces. The Soldiers were mobilized to assist the emerging government of Afghanistan as the country struggles to recover from nearly 30 years of conflict.

The first group of Soldiers returned home on June 1 and the last welcome home ceremony was on Sept. 30.

"These Soldiers did a number of remarkable things while they were deployed and we are proud of everything they accomplished," said Maj. Gen. William Enyart, Adjutant General for the Illinois National Guard. "The Illinois National Guard family extends its thanks and appreciation to these extraordinary Soldiers and to the entire 33rd on a job well done."

Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Phoenix VIII was directly responsible for nearly 8,000 combined U.S. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, including the Illinois National Guard's 33rd IBCT. The CJTF Phoenix VIII fielded 88 Embedded Training Teams and mentored 30 Afghan National Army Battalions in six Afghan Regional Security Integration Commands. Its 93 Police Mentor Teams advised Afghan National Police and Afghan Border Police and CJTF Phoenix VIII controlled 19 Operational Coordination Centers across Afghanistan.

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“These Soldiers came together to accomplish a common task and did a terrific job,” said Col. Michael Haerr of Eureka, Deputy Commander of the 33rd IBCT. “The most fun I have had over the last year is the recent welcome home ceremonies and seeing these troops come home to their families. Planning these welcome home ceremonies was no easy task and we couldn’t have done it without the help of the veterans service organizations and community volunteers. From Woodstock to West Frankfort and everywhere in between, these groups helped make it a success.”

The Illinois National Guard Soldiers accomplished many things during their deployment. Many of the Soldiers were split from their original company when they arrived in Afghanistan, with the brigade helping to support 226 bases in Afghanistan. Some of these accomplishments include:

- Helped reduce the poppy crop production in Afghanistan: Discovered and later burned 11.2 tons of poppy seeds
- Assisted with 19 road projects
- Helped dig 135 wells
- Helped build 12 medical clinics
- Helped build 15 schools
- Helped repair 14 civic or cultural centers
- Provided 200 emergency tents for flood victims
- 2.7 million pounds of humanitarian assistance distributed

During the course of the deployment, more than 4,600 awards were given to Soldiers from the 33rd IBCT. This includes 66 Purple Hearts, 606 Bronze Stars, eight Bronze Stars with valor, 909 Meritorious Service Medals, 765 Combat Action Badges, and 576 Combat Infantry Badges.

“I am very proud of everything we accomplished,” said Col. Scott Thoele of Quincy, Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. “We helped expand the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police and improved their training. Our Soldiers also had a big part in making the Afghan elections successful by making the polling sites secure. The troops did a tremendous job and made us all proud.”

While the Soldiers get most of the credit for the war they fight overseas, many times the loved ones back home are the forgotten heroes. Kris Fuhr, of Park Ridge, spent a year apart from her husband, Lt. Col. Dan Fuhr, and said it was great to finally have him home.

“As the leader of a Family Readiness Group (group of military families), I was really proud of how the families pulled together and supported each other and the Soldiers during a really stressful year,” Kris Fuhr said. “We are all so happy to have our loves ones home.”

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While the Soldiers were deployed, the Illinois National Guard Chaplain Corps was also working hard stateside. Lt. Col. Jerry Gleason of Bartlett is an Illinois National Guard Chaplain who worked with families in 17 different armories during the 33rd deployment. He helped families in distress because of the deployment and aided families of wounded and fallen Soldiers.

"I am as relieved as the families are that these Soldiers are home," Gleason said. "It was the highlight of my job to attend some of these homecoming ceremonies and see children and wives rush to the arms of their dad and husband. It's a great feeling to see these families reunited."

More than 1,400 American Soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since the United States began operations in 2001. A total of 18 Soldiers from the 33rd IBCD died during the deployment and more than 90 others were wounded. Those that lost their lives over the course of the deployment include:

- Sgt. **Joshua W. Harris**, 21, of Romeoville, died September 17 in Gerdia Seria, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when their vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion 122nd Field Artillery, Illinois Army National Guard, Robbins.
- Staff Sgt. **Jason A. Vazquez**, 24, of Chicago, died September 17 in Gerdia Seria, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when their vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion 122nd Field Artillery, Illinois Army National Guard, Sycamore.
- Sgt. **Kevin D. Grieco**, 35, of Bartlett, died Oct. 27 in Baghlan, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when a suicide bomber detonated explosives as they were preparing to enter a building. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery, Illinois Army National Guard, Sycamore.
- Staff Sgt. **Jason E. Burkholder**, 27, of Champaign, died Feb. 8 in Kabul, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment of Marion.
- 1st Lt. **Jared W. Southworth**, 26, of Oakland, died Feb. 8 in Kabul, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment of Marion.
- Sgt. **Schuyler B. Patch**, 25, of Galva, died Feb. 24, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Kewanee.
- Sgt. **Scott B. Stream**, 39, of Mattoon, died Feb. 24, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Effingham.
- Sgt.. **Simone A. Robinson**, 21, of Dixmoor, died March 1 at Brooke Army Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near her security post on Jan. 17 in Kabul, Afghanistan. She was assigned to the 634th Brigade Support Battalion of the Illinois Army National Guard, Crestwood.

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- Sgt. **Christopher P. Abeyta**, 23, of Midlothian, died March 15 a result of injuries sustained in Kot, Afghanistan, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. Abeyta was transported to Jalabad, Afghanistan, where he later died. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Woodstock.
- Sgt. **Robert M. Weinger**, 24, of Round Lake Beach, died March 15 a result of injuries sustained in Kot, Afghanistan, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. Weinger was transported to Jalabad, Afghanistan, where he later died. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Woodstock.
- Spc. **Norman L. Cain III**, 22, of Mt. Morris, died March 15 as the result of injuries sustained in Kot and he died at the scene of the incident in Kot, Afghanistan, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Woodstock.
- Sgt. **Lukasz D. Saczek**, 23, of Lake in the Hills, died May 10 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of injuries sustained from a non-combat related incident. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, Woodstock.
- Staff Sgt. **Joshua A. Melton**, 26, of Carlyle, died June 19 in Kandahar, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Marion.
- Staff Sgt. **Paul G. Smith**, 43, of East Peoria, died June 19 in Kandahar, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry, Aurora.
- 1st Lt. **Derwin I. Williams**, 41, of Glenwood, died July 6 in Konduz, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Troop B, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry based in Dixon.
- Sgt. **Chester W. Hosford**, 35, of Ottawa, died July 6 in Konduz, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Troop B, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry based in Dixon.
- Spc. **Christopher M. Talbert**, 24, of Galesburg, died July 7 in Shindad, Afghanistan of wounds sustained when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Marion.
- Sgt. **Gerrick D. Smith**, 19, of Sullivan, died July 29 in Herat, Afghanistan, of injuries sustained from a non-combat related incident. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Illinois Army National Guard, Marion.

Over the next three months the 33rd IBCT will officially mark the end of its deployment by participating in reintegration activities. The goal of the events is to let the families and Soldiers know what to expect as they continue to reunite with their families and help the Soldiers make a successful transition to civilian life after deployment.



Photo by Mike Chrisman, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office/ Staff Sgt. Cory Ginger of Marseilles, a member of Troop B, 106th Cavalry in Dixon, hugs his 8-year old daughter after the two reunite during a homecoming ceremony in Marseilles on Sept. 19. Ginger is one of nearly 3,000 Soldiers from the Illinois National Guard's 33rd IBCT who deployed to Afghanistan as part of the largest overseas deployment of Illinois National Guard Soldiers since World War II.

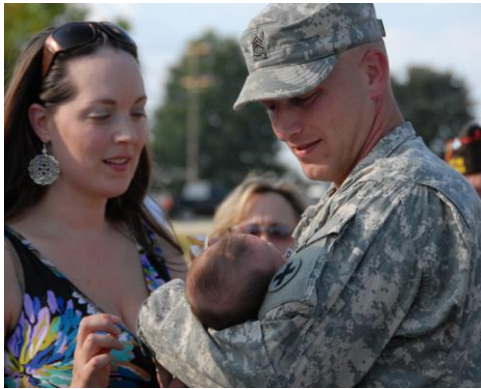


Photo by Mike Chrisman, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office/ Sgt. 1st Class Adam Bolthouse of Loves Park, a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion in Machesney Park, holds his 8-week son following a homecoming ceremony on Sept. 14 in Machesney Park. "It was very rewarding just to hold him," Bolthouse said. "I am glad to be home. There are no words to describe it." Bolthouse is one of nearly 3,000 Soldiers from the Illinois National Guard's 33rd IBCT that deployed to Afghanistan as part of the largest overseas deployment of Illinois National Guard Soldiers since World War II.



Photo by Spc. Lalita Laksbergs, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office/ Hundreds of supporters turn out Aug. 2 to welcome home members of the Kankakee-based Company C, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry. The Kankakee unit was one of 30 Illinois National Guard units mobilized last year and deployed to Afghanistan as part of the largest overseas deployment in state history.



Photo by Spc. Lalita Laksbergs, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office/ A young child waits by a crowded Freeport street amidst flags anxious for his Soldier to come home from Afghanistan. Members of the Freeport-based 333rd Military Police Company were deployed in August 2008 and came home to the open arms of their friends and families on Aug. 26. Nearly 3,000 Soldiers from the Illinois National Guard were deployed to Afghanistan last year as part of the largest overseas deployment of Illinois National Guard Soldiers since World War II.



Photo by Staff Sgt. April Hawes, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office/
Staff Sgt. John Hemingway, of Chicago, assigned to Company E, 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Joliet, recently returned home from a year-long deployment in Afghanistan with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. He returned Aug. 20 with Company G, 634th BSB based in Crestwood.

For high resolution photos contact the Public Affairs Office at ngilstaffpao@ng.army.mil